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SUBJECT: Senator Voinovich in Belgrade: Turn Over Mladic  
and Engage (but Verify) on Kosovo

11. (SBU) Summary: Senator Voinovich drew on his long record of personal involvement with Serbia's democratic transition in urging the Serbian government to make more progress on cooperation with ICTY and Kosovo. In separate meetings with PM Kostunica, FM Draskvoic, MoD Stankovic and in a longer dinner with President Tadic, the Senator pressed his counterparts to get Mladic to the Hague and to focus on verification and implementation (rather than prevarication) with regards to a Kosovo settlement. End Summary

12. (SBU) During a one-day visit to Belgrade on March 23, Senator George Voinovich (R-Ohio) pressed all four Serbian leaders to do more to get Mladic to the Hague and to give Serbia a push forward. He recounted his active personal involvement on MFN, on debt relief, and on a host of other key issues and noted his rising frustration that Serbia continued to trail other countries in the region. "Nothing would make me happier," he observed, "then to welcome Croatia, Macedonia, and Serbia all into NATO together as new members -- this would be a dream come true." The Senator was critical of how the ICTY had handled the Milosevic case by allowing it to drag on for four years -- but argued that the Milosevic death was an opportunity, not a hindrance, to acting now on Mladic to free up integration into the EU and NATO and to end the need for U.S. certification on cooperation with the ICTY.

13. (SBU) PM Kostunica said he shared the Senator's frustration. The Mladic issue overshadowed everything and his turnover was long overdue. He downplayed any comparison with the Gotovina case in Croatia, noting that there was no support for Mladic coming from his government or from the military; the government had enlisted all of its resources in the search. The climate had changed in Serbia, said Kostunica, with the public in full agreement that no one man should hold the country hostage. Kostunica lamented the ICTY's recent decision to allow Kosovar ICTY-indictee Haradinaj to engage in politics and Ceku's election as the new Prime Minister, notwithstanding an existing arrest warrant against him. This double standard confused the Serb public, said Kostunica, but at the end of the day Mladic's capture was not a problem of political will but rather a technical operational challenge.

14. (SBU) Defense Minister Stankovic noted his own progress in eliminating the vestiges of a support network for Mladic that had existed in the Ministry of Defense in the past and committed to doing more. Foreign Minister Draskovic pressed Senator Voinovich to consider easing up on Mladic conditionality so that Serbia could enter Partnership for Peace. It was more important than ever to support Serbia's democrats, said Draskovic. Progress on European integration was sorely needed for a population that was frustrated about its future.

15. (SBU) Voinovich pressed equally hard on Kosovo, challenging both Tadic and Kostunica to identify the tangible benefits of keeping it as part of Serbia. Demographics and economic realities would continue to discourage Serbs from staying or returning to Kosovo. Why not focus instead on ensuring a strong and objective mechanism for verifying implementation of provisions on decentralization, minority rights and protection of patrimonial sites? Voinovich urged Tadic and his advisor Leon Kojen, a member of the Serb negotiating team, to insist on the toughest standard of verification in the final settlement. "The Albanians have not delivered so many times -- I certainly would not sign anything until I saw tangible proof that they are ready to live up to their commitments."

16. (SBU) PM Kostunica complained about the double standard the IC was applying on Kosovo. The pressing issue was one of human rights and religious freedom but there was also an important political principle related to how countries in Europe addressed problems of minority rights. There were countless examples in Europe of problems like Kosovo -- Catalonia, Basques, Corsica to name a few -- but only Serbia was being pressured to change its borders. The standard in Europe was to address minority problems in-country. Yes, Milosevic had blood on his hands but there were others in Europe's very long history who also had blood on their hands. Yes, Kosovars were forced to flee in 1999 but, unlike Serbs who fled after the bombing, all the Albanians (and some) returned. Why treat Serbia differently? Why abandon the European principle? Why not seek a solution that would reinforce multi-ethnic outcomes?

17. (SBU) Tadic also questioned the logic of creating new microstates and undermining existing multi-ethnic ones. As to the benefits from Kosovo, Tadic suggested it would be more appropriate to consider what the costs for Serbia would be if Kosovo became independent. Rising nationalism, a government in Belgrade controlled by the Radicals and Socialists, and further delay in Serbia's economic transition. Kojen said concerns about implementation were exactly why Belgrade was moving carefully on decentralization issues, particularly in light of the unbelievable assurances from the Kosovo side that decentralization and minority rights could only come after independence. Tadic observed that he would continue to look for ways to strengthen the democratic block, noting his recent offer to replace the Socialists (SPS) as the out-of-coalition supporter of the current government.

18. (SBU) Voinovich raised the pending bilateral defense agreements, congratulating the Serbian government on its approval (earlier in the day) of the weapons of mass destruction (WMD) agreement. Voinovich recalled Ohio's active cooperation with Hungary under the State Partnership Program and expressed hope that the same could be done with Serbia, once the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) was signed.

19. (SBU) Voinovich pressed similar themes in an interview with Radio Television Serbia, noting his active efforts to promote Serbia's democratic transition and expressing his hope that the Mladic issue be quickly resolved to allow Serbia's rapid integration into Euro-Atlantic structures.

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